DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 837 EA 025 196

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TITLE Collaborative Decision Making between New Principals and Teachers: Policy and Practice.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; *Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Principals; Public Schools; *School Based Management; *Teacher Administrator Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (Victoria)

ABSTRACT

Teacher participation in school decision making, often called participative or collaborative decision making, continues to be of significant interest in education research. Much of the discussion of collaborative decision making has centered on its claimed advantages. Research also has examined the economic, political, social, and cultural pressures which have contributed to school based decision making. Also, school-based management increases the sense of personal and political efficacy, broadens professional understanding, and increases trust in school organization. A study in Victoria, Australia, examined collaborative decision-making between beginning principals and teachers. Government policy in Victoria requires devolution of authority and responsibility to the school community, collaborative decision making, a responsive bureaucracy, educational outcomes, and the active redress of disadvantage and discrimination. The Beginning Principals Study was designed to determine how beginning principals implemented collaborative decision making. Interviews and questionnaires were used to study how 12 Victoria principals and teachers handled collaborative decision making situations. In all the decisions both the quality of the decision and its acceptance by staff were considered crucial. The study also suggests that when teachers are involved in meaningful collaboration and their input is considered important, conflict can be avoided. (Contains 26 references.) (JPT)

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# Collaborative Decision Making Between New Principals and Teachers: Policy and Practice

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Decision making in organizations, including schools, has been the focus of research and writing in educational administration for many years (Griffiths, 1959; Dill, 1964; Owens, 1970). It is widely accepted that decision making is a key function or activity of administrators. Owens, (1991) has suggested that it may be the core process of administration to which all other activities are subordinated.

One aspect of decision making which continues to attract significant interest in education is teachers' participation in school decisions. The terms participative and collaborative have been used to describe decision making processes which involve those who are to carry out the decisions or whom the decisions otherwise affect (Conway, 1984; Minister of Education, 1983).

The interest in participative decision making in schools has been heightened recently as a result of a greater focus of attention on school-based decision making and management. This has occurred in a number of countries, and there has been a considerable amount of discussion in the literature concerning claimed advantages of the devolution of certain classes of decision making from central bureaucracies to schools.

Developments in several countries where changes in the organisation of education have occurred, have been described by Caldwell (1990). Seddon, Angus and Poole (1991) have examined the economic political, social, and cultural pressures which have contributed to the rise of school-based decision making and management as an administrative strategy in education. In discussing implications for school personnel including principals, Chapman (1990) argued that involvement in school decision making increases the sense of personal and political efficacy of participants, broadens professional understanding, and increases trust in the organization of the school. In a personal testimony Bergman (1992) reviewed lessons he had learned as a principal involved in site-based management.

In a review of research, Conway (1984) noted that the process of participative decision making occurs in a context which assumes relationships of sub-ordination and domination between those involved in the process. He also concluded that there is no overwhelming evidence that involving people in the process of reaching a choice produces either greater production or job satisfaction. Instead, there are conditions under which participation seems to work and not work. The administrative challenge is deciding when and in what form participation will be efficacious.

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, April 12-16, 1993.

EA 025 196

The purpose of this paper is to outline the nature and scope of the requirements for collaborative decision making between principals and teachers in Victoria, Australia, to describe the ways in which a group of beginning principals implemented these requirements, and to examine the nature of their collaborative decision making in the light of recent research and theoretical frameworks proposed.

In doing so, it will go some way towards meeting the need for more field-based, exploratory research into how administrators and teachers negotiate decisions in the day-to-day management of schools, a need referred to by both Conway (1984) and Conley (1991).

The nature of participative decision making, and theoretical frameworks derived from previous research are discussed first. This is followed by an outline of the requirements for collaborative decision making in schools in Victoria, Australia, and its implications for the role of principal. Finally, some theoretical frameworks are applied to selected data from a study of beginning principals in Victoria, in order to examine the nature of the collaborative decision making processes and their effects. In this paper, the term participative decision making is used when referring to previous research. The term collaborative decision making is used in relation to the particular forms used in Victorian schools, in accordance with the local nomenclature.

## The Nature of Participative Decision Making

In attempting to understand the nature of collaborative decision making in Victorian schools it is helpful to consider dimensions of such decision making identified in the literature.

Based on a review of studies of participative decision making, Conway (1984) identified three dimensions useful in defining the nature of the participative decision process: the degree of participation, the content of the decisions, and the scope of the decisions. In relation to content, he specified three basic areas: those concerned with the maintenance of the organization, those of a personal nature, and those associated with professional work. As a guide for determining the nature and extent of participative decision making in different situations, Conway (1984) also proposed a problem typology, consisting of four different problem types:

Type I Problem - Quality of decision is required and acceptance is easy to achieve.

Type II Problem - There is no quality criterion, but acceptance is critical for full implementation.

Type III Problem - Neither the quality of the decision nor the acceptance is critical.

Type IV Problem - Both the quality of the decision and the acceptance are critical to organizational goals.

(adapted from Conway, 1984, p.31).

Initially, we considered this typology, together with the dimensions of degree of participation, content, and scope of decisions would be a useful

framework for examining the collaborative decision making between principals and teachers in Victorian schools, based on decision incidents reported by the principals and some teachers. However, when we examined such decision incidents more closely, serious shortcomings of Conway's typology and other dimensions for our purposes became evident. These are:

1. The typology is reduced from four types to no more than two (Types 1 and 4). This is because it is argued that, logically, all decisions reported by the principals would be expected to be those in which quality of the decision (and perhaps acceptance) is important. Furthermore, the decision areas formally included within the ambit of collaborative decision making in Victorian schools, as described below, involved quality as a criterion;

2. The framework did not prove sufficiently powerful as a tool for analysis;

3. Additional or different relevant factors were suggested by the data.

These shortcomings are illustrated in the discussion of reported decision incidents later in this paper.

In a recent review of research on teacher participation in school decision making, Conley, (1991) identified other dimensions from the research which could be of potential help in overcoming these shortcomings. These included an operational-strategic dimension, the notion of a contested zone of decision making, and a distinction between authority and influence in decisions. Four decision areas based on the operational - strategic dimension and whether they primarily affected individuals or the organization as a whole were proposed by Bacharach, Bamberger and Conley, (1990). They found that teachers appeared to want more influence on operational decisions concerning direct student instruction than on strategic school administration. For both strategic and operational decisions, teachers reported more deprivation in the organizational domains than in the personal domains. Hanson, (1979) argued the existence of a "contested zone" of decision making in schools between decisions primarily belonging to teachers, (e.g., how to teach) and those belonging primarily to administrators, (e.g., budget development, expenditure priorities). Conley (1991) proposed five decision areas within the contested zone: allocation decisions, (e.g., teacher scheduling), security decisions, (e.g., student rights), boundary decisions, (e.g., parent-teacher interface), evaluation decisions, (e.g., teacher promotion), and instructional decisions, (e.g., school curriculum policies). Within the contested zone, Conley asserted that allocation decisions are strategic in nature while the other four are operational. Conley also warned that increasing teacher participation in the contested zone may give rise to conflict between teachers and administrators. This model seemed to us to provide a promising conceptual framework for the examination of the collaborative decisions between principals and teachers in the Victorian school context.

On the basis of literature she reviewed, Conley (1991) argued that research must address the distinction between authority (final decision making power) and influence (capacity to shape decisions through informal and nonauthoritative means). She cited research which suggests that influence rather than authority may be the underlying issue in current school reform

efforts. However, the results of studies of influence patterns in the movement towards school-based management are mixed.

**The Requirements for Collaborative Decision Making in Victoria**

In 1982, a new government was elected in the state of Victoria, Australia which was committed to a number of policy principles in education, including:

- genuine devolution of authority and responsibility to the school community;
- collaborative decision making processes;
- a responsive bureaucracy, the main function of which is to service and assist schools;
- effectiveness of educational outcomes; and
- the active redress of disadvantage and discrimination. (Minister of Education, 1983, p.4).

The Government subsequently published a series of Ministerial Papers which defined the parameters of educational development in schools for the following years. The first of these Papers focused on decision making (Minister of Education, 1983). The government's position on decision making is contained in the following quote from the Paper:

> This commitment will mean that parents, teachers, students and administrators ... will have the right to participate in decision making processes. They come together as a group charged with the collective responsibility of reaching agreement or coming to a decision ... (through) collaborative decision making processes (p.4).

Furthermore, the new Government was committed to reforming industrial relations with teachers, following a long period of teacher unrest over issues which included staffing and conditions, and the teacher unions' campaign for direct negotiations with the Education Department (Spaull & Hince, 1986).

One outcome of this situation was the negotiation of formal agreements on conditions and staffing between the Government of Victoria and the Education Department on the one hand, and the three teacher unions, representing teachers from the three existing divisions of the Education Department, on the other. The Education Minister announced the completion of the first of these agreements with the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association (VSTA) in relation to secondary (high) schools on October 20 1982. Agreements with the Victorian Teachers Union in respect of primary (elementary) schools followed shortly after, and with the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria in relation to secondary technical schools during 1984. In the early years, new agreements were negotiated annually. However, a two-year agreement was negotiated for 1986-7, and three-year agreements subsequently.

Although there were some differences in content between the three agreements, these were relatively minor, and the same basic structure and content applied for all teachers and principals in all types of schools. A range of matters relating to teachers' conditions of work and the staffing of schools was covered in the agreements, including physical resources, teachers' hours of work and duties, participation and consultation, class

sizes, operation of school libraries, staffing of schools, teachers' professional development, and grievance resolution. The agreements were developed further over the period 1983-1991, with later agreements tending to be more well defined and specific, and including specified participation of the school union branch and/or its representatives in certain areas of decision making.

The section of the agreements titled "Participation and Consultation at the School Level" is of particular interest for the present discussion. It required the establishment in every school of representative committees with structures agreed on between the principal and the union branch. The representative committees in secondary schools were required to have gender balance in accordance with the Action Plan for Women in the Teaching Service (Ministry of Education (Schools Division), 1986), and in primary schools to reflect the gender balance in the school. The actual structures and processes for collaboration in school level decision making could vary from school to school. However, it was required that one of the representative committees was a local administrative committee (LAC), charged with assisting the principal in certain organizational and administrative duties.

In secondary schools these duties included determining allotments, staffing allocations, class sizes, the lengths of periods, the allocation of organizational duties and their time allowances including the determination of areas to receive higher duties allowances (HDAs) and school responsibility positions, and the allocations of HDAs, the tagging of positions to be advertised, and other administrative matters in accordance with the Agreement. In primary schools, matters to be considered by the LAC included, at least: staff decision making processes, the allocation of Administrative and Planning Time, class sizes, yard duty, regularity of staff meetings, grade allocations, school administered replacement teacher days, the allocation of Higher Duties, and ensuring the implementation of the relevant sections of the Action Plan for Women in the Teaching Service. It was mandatory for the composition of LACs in secondary schools to be agreed in writing between the principal and the union branch, to include the principal, one principal's nominee, and at least two members of the union branch. Either the principal or the principal's nominee was to be a woman. It was required that the composition of LACs in primary schools be agreed between the principal and the union sub-branch, and include the principal and a union representative. A Curriculum Committee was also required under the Agreement for secondary schools, to assist the principal "in matters of an educational and curriculum nature, especially in relation to the school council". (Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, 1991, p.9)

The principal, who had ultimate administrative and operational responsibility for the school, had the right to reject conclusions of committees under these procedures, but was required to give reasons for doing so.

Changes to the Role of Principal

Prior to the establishment of agreements on conditions and staffing, the Education Department sent to principals each year documentation which set out the requirements concerning matters such as class size and maximum teaching loads. It was not unusual for the teacher unions to disagree

with the content of the document, and argument and industrial action would frequently result. Such action was most often taken on a school-by-school basis rather than via a statewide approach. While this sometimes resulted in changes being made to conditions and staffing prescriptions, it could be trying and disruptive for the individual principals and schools involved.

The introduction of the conditions and staffing agreements, and in particular the formal requirement for collaborative decision making between principals and teachers, had considerable implications for the role of teacher and very significant implications for the role of principal. For teachers, it meant becoming familiar with the relevant agreement and its meaning in their school, and coming to terms with the assumption that they were willing and had appropriate knowledge and skills to participate significantly in school decision making.

For principals, the change was rather more dramatic. While a teacher could avoid actual participation in the major committees established, and thereby keep to the periphery of the collaborative decision making process, the principal could not. There was now a formal requirement to consult meaningfully through agreed structures on matters previously considered to be in the decision making domain of the principal alone, or of the Education Department. In the first year of implementation of the Agreements, some principals considered they had suffered a loss of power and authority as a result of the Agreements and other organizational and structural changes in the Education Department (Chapman 1986). However, under the new arrangements there was, arguably, the opportunity to gain a greater commitment to the life of the school, a more professional approach from teachers, and a more stable environment in which to plan and carry out the work of the school.

Under the new Government's policies of devolution and collaborative decision making, the principal's role had become much more complex. This was emphasised in a new role statement for principals, circulated to schools in December 1983 and first published in the Education Gazette in 1984 (Education Department, Victoria, 1984), and in which the dual role of the principal was clearly enunciated:

> The principal carries out the dual role of being both the representative of the Education Department and thereby responsible to the Director General and also being Executive Officer of the School Council, responsible to the School Council for the implementation of Council policies and decisions on all matters within its jurisdiction.
>
> The principal carries ultimate responsibility for the administration and organization of the school, though this responsibility is to be exercised in consultation with staff. (p.443)

In this statement the role of the principal was spelled out in some detail in relation to the various facets of the job, including collaborative decision making. Of the 37 separate clauses in the main body of the statement, 13 referred specifically to the provision of relevant information to, or collaboration with, members of the school community. Examples included: "To facilitate effective communication and collaboration between staff, students, parents and the wider community"; "To ensure that staff members have maximum input into all decisions relating to the school

program in general and the areas in which they teach in particular." (Education Department, Victoria, 1984, p.444). The requirement for collaborative decision making was further reinforced through the brief statements from the relevant schools published with the calls for applications for principal positions. In the first round of vacancies after the implementation of the first conditions and staffing agreement for secondary schools and the publishing of the new principals' role statement, 13 of the 24 brief statements from schools with vacant principal positions made specific reference to the expectation that the successful candidate would hold a commitment to the principle of collaborative decision making (Education Department, Victoria, 1984). This proportion increased in later years.

## Implementing the Requirements for Collaborative Decision Making

There is some evidence that the first conditions and staffing agreement was not treated seriously in some schools*. However, this changed over time. In order to investigate the effect on the principalship of the recent major changes to the structure and functioning of the Education Department, Chapman (1986) interviewed seven principals, and teachers from five schools during 1984. This was the second year in which a conditions and staffing agreement was operative, and the first in which the establishment of a LAC was required. She encountered mixed reactions. During 1985 she collected information to develop a descriptive profile of teachers participating in formal decision making committees of schools (Chapman, 1988). However, this information contained little about the nature and effects of the collaborative decision making in the schools concerned.

More detailed information has become available recently as a result of data gathered during the Beginning Principals Study. This information concerns the ways in which beginning principals with up to three years' experience implemented the requirements of collaborative decision making in their schools and dealt with the issues surrounding the structures and processes involved.

### The Beginning Principals Study

The Beginning Principals Study was commenced in 1989 and was designed primarily to develop a picture of the worklife of the first-time principal. Longer term aims of the study are to identify keys to success for the role of principal, and to propose appropriate research based induction, training, and support systems for the beginning principal.

Two samples of eight and four first-time principals were selected from the respective cohorts of principals who first took up a principal positions in Victorian schools at the start of 1989 and 1990. The samples were selected at random, with provisions to ensure that they were broadly representative of the variety of principals and schools in the Victorian state school system. This involved making sure that there was a reasonable geographic and socioeconomic spread of schools, and, given that the majority of principals were males, that there was at least one female amongst the

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* Personal communication with members of the Industrial Relations Unit, Ministry of Education (formerly Education Department).

primary and secondary school principals selected. Each principal was assigned to a researcher who interviewed the principal at the school on four occasions during the first year and on three occasions during subsequent years. On two of these site visits the researcher also interviewed a sample of teachers. In addition to the school visits, regular telephone interviews were held with each principal. Interview guides were used for all interviews, and the principals were encouraged to speak freely about the issues affecting them.

To complement the data derived from the interviews, a questionnaire was sent in October of each year to the population of first-time principals who took up their positions in the January of that year. Further details concerning the methods used in the study are provided elsewhere (Beeson & Matthews, 1991, 1992).

Beginning Principals, Teachers, and Collaborative Decision Making

Analysis of the data from the two samples relevant to the beginning principal's first six months identified seven major areas of concern for the principal: policies and curriculum; relationships with staff; the image of the school in the wider community; administrative matters; communication; discipline; and time management (Beeson & Matthews, 1991). Significantly, collaborative decision making was not one of the beginning principals' major areas of concern at this stage. Moreover, when asked late in their first year specifically about industrial relations, all denied it was one of their major concerns. This was not, perhaps, what may have been expected, given the nature of the conditions and staffing agreements, their origins, and the level of union branch involvement in the formal decision making committees.

On the other hand, nearly 40% of the respondents to a survey of all beginning principals late in their first year rated "establishing or improving consultative procedures" a significant problem they had encountered during their first year, thereby placing it in the "top eight" problems as identified through the surveys. However, they did not identify it as one of the major tasks facing them at the start of their principalship.

It must be pointed out that two of the major concern areas identified - policies and curriculum, and relationships with staff - did involve issues which were related in some way to the work of the LAC and/or the Curriculum Committee. Many of the issues included in the terms of reference of these two committees inevitably had significant effects on school organization, staffing, and the nature of the curriculum, and thereby on the personal worklives and relationships of individual teachers. Particularly sensitive issues included teaching allotments and workloads, time allocations to subjects, staffing requirements, and declaring teachers "in excess". The principals did sometimes struggle with the decision making. One principal commented, "I find it difficult to know how much to suggest beforehand - how much of a tentative plan I should express. I don't know whether to approach the Administrative Committee completely openly or with a number of suggestions or even a preferred option".

However, in terms of the decisions themselves, it was not always clear if the struggle was made any less or more difficult by the procedures required. Especially in their early months, the beginning principals found

many of the decisions that had to be made difficult, and their quantity and constancy burdensome. Despite this, and the collaboration requirements, the principals appeared not to be discouraged from making decisions of a supervisory kind or issuing instructions as they saw fit. One principal "used a mixture of the principal's right to tell the teacher what his responsibilities are, and just encourage him". Another noted that some teachers "just need to be instructed about what is expected and reasonable". A third reported "I have had to come the heavy with a few teachers and tell a few off for not getting to their classes on time or dismissing classes early. I have spoken about these matters once in general and have also spoken to two teachers privately".

Some principals, apparently those who were most committed to collaborative decision making and who used it effectively, expressed concern on occasions over the level of experience or other qualities of teachers elected to, or willing to be involved in, the main committees. One commented that "there have recently been elections for the new LAC and I'm rather disappointed in it. The people on it are less able to handle the issues", and another reported that "the LAC is fine, but I often wish that they had more experience. There is only one experienced teacher on it. I take quite a lot of time on explaining how the school and the Agreement works".

There was some evidence that, when teachers were satisfied they were being consulted and the collaborative procedures adhered to, and when things were going along smoothly, they were less anxious to be involved in the process:

> Because they think they have picked me - the VSTA Branch - therefore they are much less aggressive and much more conciliatory. [The VSTA Branch supported the appointment of the Principal, on the basis that he was a "union principal".] I am only just finding out all about this that went on last year [during his selection]. Because of this there is much less aggro, fewer hassles, etc. All elections and appointments used to be hotly contested last year but now there is a fundamental lack of interest. I take this as a positive sign - people are not ringing each other up and lobbying, etc. - it has become much less political. But there is still a healthy number of people interested in getting on the School Council.

On the other hand, when the situation was difficult, the LAC in particular could be a powerful critic of the principal. In one school, the LAC accused the principal of lacking empathy, being rude to staff, and at one stage presented her with a list of "What Lesley has done" since the beginning of the year, and of which they disapproved.

The weight of evidence from the Beginning Principals Study indicates that teachers wanted a principal to be decisive, but within a collaborative model. As one teacher commented in relation to her new principal who was committed to the participative procedures, "The leadership is pleasing - the principal is decisive, rather than being 'airy-fairy'. The collaborative process is not being used as a cover".

Use of the Committee Structure

Decision making in relation to the school Local Administrative Committee (LAC) and Curriculum Committee was more of an issue in the secondary schools than the primary schools in the samples. The new principals used

the committees in somewhat different ways. Two of the six secondary school principals adopted a strong decision making stance themselves. Both these principals were quite comfortable with the two committees and their operation. (In fact, both had declared themselves as 'a union principal', or a 'union man'.) However, they did not consider the advice of either committee as the last word on any matter, and reserved the right, as principal, to make a decision contrary to the advice of a committee. In general, such action did not seem to be necessary, in the eyes of the principals concerned.

Two others saw their pro-active decision making role being played as members of the committees. Their view was, basically, that they would prefer to work through the structure, and that they ought to be able to 'win the day' on arguments in the committees, rather than outside them. They also considered this approach to be in the spirit of the Agreement and the Ministry of Education's* expectations. One of these two also considered herself a strong union person.

Other principals tended to regard the committees more as the decision makers. In their conversations they used expressions such as "the LAC made a decision", and referred to having to "put it to the LAC". While such a view did not necessarily represent an abrogation of decision making responsibility to a committee (especially the LAC), it does indicate an important difference in approach from the first two principals referred to above, although this difference may be a subtle one in practice. In fact, at least one of these two principals regarded herself as a strong decision maker, and there was some comment from teachers that she had made decisions with insufficient consultation.

The Nature of Collaborative Decision Incidents

In terms of Conway's (1984) definition, the kind of decision making embodied in the agreements between the Government of Victoria, Ministry of Education and the teacher unions was internal, involving administrators and teachers, as opposed to external, involving administrators and members of the wider community. Furthermore, the format of the decision making could be classified as mandated rather than voluntary, formal rather than informal, and direct as opposed to indirect (Conway 1984).

In the following section, a number of decision incidents are examined using as frameworks for analysis the three dimensions and the problem typology described by Conway (1984), and the notion of zones of decision making, level of influence, and the strategic - operational dimension described by Conley (1991).

In considering these incidents it is important to note that, since the 1970s, Victorian teachers have had influence over most operational decisions at both individual and organizational levels, including the design of courses in the primary and lower secondary levels, selection of textbooks, and teaching strategies in the classroom. In Victorian schools, the existence of both Local Administrative Committees and Curriculum Committees as well as School Councils and their standing committees on such

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* formerly Education Department.

areas as finance, facilities, and curriculum, all of which have teacher membership, have enabled teachers to participate in decisions of both operational and strategic kinds. Furthermore, these bodies have also enabled teachers to participate in the administrator decision zone as well as in the contested decision zone.

The following six incidents cover a broad range of aspects related to the way the principals and teachers approached and negotiated the issues at hand. They were not selected in a way meant to be representative of all decisions made by principals and teachers in collaboration, but as a means of exploring the application of the theoretical frameworks identified to the analysis of the nature of the decision making processes used.

Incident 1:

The first incident relates to a ten-day timetable that existed in the school prior to appointment of the new principal. The principal considered that it was not a desirable organizational arrangement and had also discovered that many teachers were not in favour of it. However, as this kind of change came within the ambit of the LAC, the principal was unable to act unilaterally. In Conway's (1984) terms, this is a Type IV problem because, as the decision to implement the ten-day timetable was previously made by the LAC, the principal would need to have a high level of acceptance to implement any change smoothly. Furthermore, because vested interests in terms of time allocations for each subject were at stake, acceptance of any change would not be easy to accomplish. The decision also involved a quality criterion.

When asked, late in her first year, what had happened about the ten-day timetable, the principal replied:

> We still have it! I still want to get rid of it; most people dislike it. My plan for the change in Year 8 subjects would have helped to get rid of it, but once that change didn't occur, the two weekly time-table had to remain for 1991, because there were seven periods of Humanities per fortnight [two weeks]. Many staff members, including all curriculum committee members don't seem to realise that, in postponing one decision, they had also postponed the other.

In dealing with this issue the principal recognized that the teaching staff both collectively and individually had a big stake in any decision to change it. A change could bring reduced class contact hours for some teachers and so increase their vulnerability in any subsequent discussions about determining those teachers who are not required in future. The principal also saw that she could not move in and make a dramatic decision for change. Rather, she noted that persuasion and influence over a longer period would be required. The change was achieved the next year, following the inclusion of new members on the curriculum committee.

This incident clearly falls in the contested zone (Conley 1991) and has the characteristics of decisions which are strategic with both personal and organizational dimensions. As the principal's actions indicate, it supports Conley's view that "contested decisions may require greater co-ordination between teachers and administrators than those falling within either the school or classroom domain" (p.242).

Incident 2:

The new principal was asked six weeks into the new year whether he had experienced any dilemmas that he had had to resolve. In answering, he highlighted what was a common theme for other beginning principals interviewed, that the financial arrangements in the school were less than satisfactory. The principal faced a dilemma.

> The second thing concerned the financial position of the school. No budgeting had been done, and therefore I had to spend a great deal of time out of school to get things in order so that the school could actually function. A problem was that once I got the job the previous Principal refused to work. (He has, at his request, and my request been made an Acting Principal of another school). The dilemma is, do you go ahead and do all the financial planning and act immediately in about a week or do you spend six to eight weeks consulting with people first? I decided that it was so urgent that it had to be done straight away.

The principal saw this as a quality issue and one where he would have preferred discussion to occur. However, he opted to take action immediately and with very little consultation in order to keep the school running. In Conley's (1991) terms, budgeting lies in the administrator's zone of decision making rather than in the contested zone. However, in the Victorian context, budgeting decisions were usually made with substantial teacher input and participation, starting with the Council's budget committee, through the LAC which had some areas of budgetary responsibility, and finally to subject departments. Teachers who were members of school councils were able to sit on the Council standing committees and have considerable influence in drafting budgets and making other recommendations relating to finances. If those same teachers were also members of the LAC, they were able to use their knowledge and experience in developing recommendations for these committees.

In this incident the principal opted to take immediate action because of his belief that urgent action was required. This cut across the participative rights of teachers on what they would almost certainly have seen as matters over which they should have some control. In the event, the principal's action in this case did not cause conflict, presumably because of the urgent need to have financial planning done by the start of the new year.

Incident 3:

The role of the principal with respect to ultimate responsibility for decisions made by both the LAC and Curriculum Committee has been described earlier. The principal has veto rights on the recommendations of these committees. However, these rights are utilised differently by different principals, as illustrated by the following incident. In the second half of his first year, Bill reported:

> Well, I've made my first controversial decision - that is a major controversial decision - in terms of staff. There have been other areas of disagreement but basically we have sorted them out. This case revolved around whether maths should be compulsory for Year 11 students.

> It was unanimously recommended by the Curriculum Committee that we change the procedures and not make Year 11 Maths compulsory. I rejected that.
>
> I have gone along with every decision so far, but I believe that staff have to see that the principal has the right to make decisions under the current industrial agreement. Several of the more knowledgeable staff are aware of this but many teachers don't understand the Agreement. The Curriculum Co-ordinator and the Year 10 Co-ordinator have come to see me and they both believe that I'm wrong. They have been pretty supportive [of me] up to now and I tend to trust their professional judgement. They still feel very strongly about it and I don't like to see them bleeding like that.

Bill also noted that the school had very well established democratic procedures for making decisions relating to curriculum matters. He believed that what upset the teachers even more, was that after engaging in a lengthy consultative process, he made a decision not to accept the advice tendered to him.

In the event, Bill left the door open a little to be convinced by demonstrated student and parent preference that his decision was wrong. Evidence that was gathered tended to support the stand he took. Interviews with teachers, including members of the Curriculum Committee, showed that the teachers accepted the principal's right to make such a decision. A typical comment (by a member of the Curriculum Committee) was: "I disagree with the decision, but I accept it, especially as there were only one or two dissenting students. The principal has the right to make that sort of decision". No lasting animosity towards the principal over this matter was evident.

The decision made by the Curriculum Committee is a Type IV problem in Conway's (1984) terms, in that both quality and acceptance are critical. In Conley's (1991) terms, the decision has both organizational and operational dimensions and it lies in the contested zone of decision making. This particular incident raises very clearly the issue of power and influence discussed by Conley (1991). In this case the principal was prepared to exercise his veto power, with potential risks attached, in what he believed were the interests of the students and the parents.

Incident 4:

This incident extends the potential for discussion of the issue of power and influence of the principal in working with the formal committees in the school. The first-year principal was discussing allocations of teachers to classes during the year, following the unexpected departure of another teacher.

> The Year 12 Coordinator matter. What I have had to do here is to get a first year teacher to take Year 11 and 12 Physics and Maths B at Year 12 which means that this teacher has to lose existing classes and take on the new ones - this just starts today.
>
> One of the problems with this democratic decision making is that staff will often bend over backwards to make it easier for someone or to soften the decision. For example, in this case the teacher

> concerned didn't want to take both of the Physics classes and the Administrative Committee were prepared to say that's okay, you needn't take both of them, but I had to insist that he takes them both, otherwise it would have been a less competent teacher who took the other class.

The incident shows how one principal works with his LAC. On the one hand, the LAC made a decision which was not acceptable to the principal and the grounds for this rejection were that students would suffer in having a less competent teacher. It is interesting to note that the principal felt that 'there are problems with this democratic decision making ...' particularly when decisions were tough and affected individual teachers. He approached the matter thoughtfully, and was prepared to be firm about its resolution.

Incident 5:

The issue of declaring teachers to be "in excess", and therefore not required the following year, has always been a difficult one for schools. It was part of the larger decision area relating to staffing, curriculum, and resource allocation, in which the teacher unions had fought hard during the 1970s for teacher participation. Surprisingly, as the incident below shows, teachers were sometimes prepared to pass up the opportunity to be involved in making the decision. One reason for this may have been because it proved to be too personal for many teachers. One principal reported his experience thus:

> At a recent staff meeting when the need to name teachers in excess had become a reality the staff voted 42-1 that the Principal make the decision on his own (the LAC only recommends in any case). During the staff meeting it was pointed out that the Principal has to bear the stigma anyway because the LAC only makes recommendations. I took this as probably something of a vote of confidence, though I am cautious about this conclusion. Since this time I have been subject to considerable lobbying from the relevant staff.

The decision was certainly a strategic one in Conley's (1991) terms, as it related to teacher allocation, budgets, and expenditure priorities. Furthermore, although the decision lay in the contested zone and was within the ambit of the LAC, the teachers collectively decided to allow the principal to make the decision, effectively removing their opportunity to participate.

A further interesting point here is that the LAC itself had also, either openly or tacitly, given up the right to decide on the matter, allowing the staff as a whole to decide how the matter would be determined. There were no examples found in the data from the Beginning Principals Study where such a situation occurred on decisions relating to allotments of lessons to the various subjects, or the allocation of higher duties allowances. On these kinds of issues teachers always exerted their influence through the LAC. It was clearly important for the principal to be sensitive to the underlying nature of each decision in order to know how the LAC and staff may react in the different situations.

Incident 6:

The examples discussed above indicate that principals engaged in the decision making process in different ways, often because of the way in which the formal committee decided to operate. However, all principals were aware that the collaborative approach required meant that, while they had to consult widely, they also had to be prepared to make decisions, with or without consultation, when the need arose. Perhaps surprisingly, teachers seemed to expect that this variation would exist despite the strong union pressure for total participation on all matters. The incident below highlights how a principal engaged his committee in solving a problem mid-way through his first year.

> I feel a lot has been achieved, things have been written down, and are working better. We are about to begin a review of the administration of the school. This includes such matters as the roles of people and their positions, lines of responsibility and accountability, decision making processes. The current model for operating the two campuses was set up at the end of 1987, and it became clear to me that it wasn't working effectively after about five weeks at the school. Ten of us met the other night for five and a half hours and developed a new model. This should stop the duplication that is going on, on the two campuses, and work effectively.

The issue dealt with teacher scheduling (contested decision zone) and administrator facilities planning (administrator decision zone) both of which have individual and organizational dimensions. However, of more significance to the present discussion is the observation that other matters including the definition of roles, lines of responsibility, and communication and decision making processes, were also decided through a collaborative approach between principal and teachers. The inclusion of these issues extends the scope of participative decisions beyond those described by Conley (1991) and Conway (1984). The inclusion of such issues expands the contested zone of decision making and has implications for the nature of decision making in schools moving towards greater self management.

## Discussion

In reviewing the above cases, what can we now say about the frameworks of Conway (1984) and Conley (1991) as devices to help in explaining decision making behaviour of formal, mandated collaborative committees and the actions of beginning principals? A summary of the outcomes of the analysis of the decision incidents is presented in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here.

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The most notable feature of this summary is the high degree of uniformity in the entries in the various columns of the table. In all decisions both the quality of the decision and its acceptance by staff were considered to be crucial, the content was strategic rather than operational, and in most cases the decision had primary impact on the organization rather than the

individual. Furthermore, all decision incidents were seen to lie in the contested zone (Conley 1991) and, with certain qualifications, participants in the decision process had a strong influence on the decision outcome. In relation to the zone of decision making, we would suggest that this is defined by the context rather than by the nature of individual decisions. Whereas in the Victorian school context all the decisions were classified in the contested zone, at least three of them (Incidents 2, 4 and 5) would have been in the administrative zone in a more traditional context. Overall, the indications are that the theoretical frameworks represented in Table 1 do not enable sufficient discrimination between the nature of the various decision incidents, nor do they appear to suit well the complexities of the decision making process when these are examined more closely.

Further exploratory research is needed to identify alternative theoretical frameworks, or further developments of existing frameworks, against which the nature of participative decision making between principal and teachers can be examined. Possible lines of investigation include the extent to which urgency of need for a decision affects the nature or use of collaboration (Incident 2), the issue of final decision making power (Incident 3), the definition and stability of a contested zone of decision making, and the issue of "deciding not to decide" (Incident 5). In relation to final decision making power, Conley (1991) asserts that "unless research addresses the distinction between authority and influence in decision making, it will offer minimal practical guidance in current debates about whether teachers should wield final decision making power or whether their involvements should be limited to influence" (p.255). In Incident 3, the issue of the principal's ultimate authority is put to the test, something which has not been discussed in the literature to any great extent.

Incident 2 highlights the fact that, in the Victorian school context, budget development, expenditure priorities, and facilities planning are located in the zone of contested decisions. Teachers expect to be involved in decisions in these areas with respect to such matters as which rooms are to be renovated, whether or not to create a second computer laboratory, and the procedures to be used for developing the budget for the next year. The boundaries of the contested zone seem to be determined by the extent and nature of the prescribed or agreed parameters for the participative decision making, and may therefore vary from one context to another.

The matter of deciding not be take part in a collaborative process for a particular decision needs further examination. Possible lines of investigation include the notion of saturation (Conway, 1984), zones of acceptance Shedd (1987), and willingness to participate (Smylie, 1992). However, there may well be other factors concerning decisions which affect individuals strongly, which are yet to be identified. We suggest that survey research is unlikely to provide the fine detail needed to unravel solutions to the important questions and that a naturalistic approach would prove more productive.

This paper has provided only a brief insight into the requirements for collaborative decision making in Victorian schools, and the way some beginning principals and their teachers responded to them. While the emphasis here has been mainly on the role of the principal as reported by the principal, the roles and responses of teachers are clearly implied.

The increasing trend towards self managing schools may well lead to an increase in the range of decisions which will be determined by collaborative processes. However, this proposition needs to be tested as it will have great impact on the ways schools will operate. The suggestion by Conley (1991) that increasing participation in the contested decision zone may lead to increased conflict also needs further testing. The data from the Beginning Principals Study suggest that the opposite may apply where teachers are involved in meaningful collaboration and have significant influence on school decisions they consider to be important. Perhaps expanding the range of decisions to which participative decision making applies increases low-level, short-term conflict, but reduces significant, longer-term conflict. The Victorian experience in which the level of industrial disputation fell away supports this contention. It is possible that there are two levels of potential conflict: a general level which may be alleviated by effective collaborative processes and conflict that surrounds individual issues.

Further research is also required into the influence of the role played by the principal in relation to formal collaborative decision making bodies in a school. An understanding of the way principals perceive their role and the impact of their influence and teachers' influence on decision making processes and outcomes is needed if we are to significantly improve our knowledge in this important area of school management.

## Notes

1. The Beginning Principals Study is a longitudinal study carried out by Geoff Beeson, Robin Matthews, Jenny Baker, and Margaret Mallia of Deakin University.

2. The assistance of Ingrid Leonard in the collation of data for this paper is acknowledged.

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GWB/RM:rc
29 March, 1993

Table 1. Application of Theoretical Frameworks Derived from Conway (1984) and Conley (1991) to Six Collaborative Decision Incidents

| Incident | CONWAY | | | | CONLEY | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Problem Type | Degree of Partic. | Content of Decision | Scope | Content | Influence | Zone |
| 1 | IV | High | Maintenance of Organization | Broad | Strategic-Organizational | High | Contested |
| 2 | IV-1[a] | - | Maintenance of Organization | N.A. | Strategic-Organizational | N.A. | Contested |
| 3 | IV | High[b] | Maintenance of Organization/ Professional Work | Broad | Strategic-Organizational | High | Contested |
| 4 | IV | High | Professional Work | Broad | Strategic-Individual | High[c] | Contested |
| 5 | IV | High/ Low[d] | Maintenance of Organization | Broad | Strategic-Organizational | High/ Low[d] | Contested |
| 6 | IV | High | Maintenance of Organization | Broad | Strategic-Organizational | High | Contested |

(a) This began as a Type IV problem, but became a Type 1, due to the principal's action.
(b) Collaborative decision ultimately overridden by the principal.
(c) Influence of principal significantly greater.
(d) High degree of participation and influence in determining who should make the final decision (the principal alone).